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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7698
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1244
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4788
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8332
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5894
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1626
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1699
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000434

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [EAID](#)

SUBJECT: FORCED RELOCATION AND MORE DEATH IN BURMA'S DELTA

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Over the last week, Embassy Rangoon has received increasing reports the regime is forcing Cyclone Nargis victims to leave government-run and private shelters and return to their villages. Local sources and UN employees confirm that forced relocation by the military in storm affected areas is systematic and wide-spread. Political activists traveling to the Delta to perform relief work report that inaccessible villages outside population centers remain out of reach. They report seeing fresh corpses of those they believe died recently of starvation. End summary.

¶2. (C) Pol/econ chief met with 88 Generation leader Toe Kyaw Hlaing and the comedian/activist Zarganar, who have teamed up to deliver relief aid to the area surrounding Bogale in the Irrawaddy Delta. They have made several trips to Bogale and report that, even though UN international staff and INGOs have a presence in Bogale Township, the outlying areas accessible only by boat are in dire need and not being reached. Many of the residents in these townships were forced out of government-run camps, monasteries, and schools where they first took shelter. The villagers recounted being forced by the military to return home to villages so they could "plant their rice crops," although they have no seeds, tools, or draft animals, according to the pair. The villagers were forced to sign documentation stating they received 35 relief items such as tents, blankets, and mosquito nets, though they received nothing other than small sums of money or some clothing items. The surviving residents of one village were given one bag of rice and one bag of beans and informed they were on their own.

¶3. (C) Toe Kyaw Hlaing reported that cyclone victims he spoke with reported the military was instructing people to tell international UN and NGO staff that only 37,000 people had died in the cyclone. Zarganar and Toe Kyaw Hlaing reported that the Delta was becoming increasingly militarized, with a large and visible presence of troops and police. Military units reportedly told victims that the relief phase was over, and that private donors would not be permitted to enter the Delta after June 3. Although Zarganar

and Toe Kyaw Hlaing reported seeing UN staff in Bogale Township, and a boat operated by crony Tay Za's Htoo trading company passing out rice, they emphasized that many remote villages accessible only by boat were not getting sufficient food or water. They reported seeing a number of corpses that were fresh and surmised the cause of death was starvation rather than the cyclone.

¶4. (C) In a separate meeting, NLD Youth leader and HIV/AIDS activist Phy Phyu Thinn informed pol/econ chief she had come out of hiding to take part in cyclone relief efforts and had made three trips to Dedaye and four trips to Bogale since the cyclone hit one month ago. She echoed Toe Kyaw Hlaing's and Zarganar's concerns, and also reported seeing bodies of those who appeared to have died recently. Phy Phyu Thinn reported visiting a monastery in Kungyangon from which local authorities forced 26 families to return to their villages, even though no preparations for proper food and shelter had been made for them.

¶5. (C) Phy Phyu Thinn, Zarganar, and Toe Kyaw Hlaing all spoke repeatedly of the psychological devastation suffered by the survivors they encountered. They reported that many residents from remote villages which suffered major loss of life appeared to be in psychological shock. Some refused to eat or speak, and community members were at a loss as how to help them. The situation was getting much worse, they asserted. Assistance only reached large population centers regularly, and the most remote areas were being neglected. They all feared that the forced return of victims to their villages would only exacerbate the problem.

¶6. (C) The Embassy has received other reports of forced relocation as well. An Embassy locally-employed staff member reported that Rangoon commander Hla Htay Win visited her

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church at a Karen Baptist Convention (KBC) compound in Rangoon on Thursday, May 29, and asked to meet cyclone victims who were being provided shelter and food there. The Commander ordered the cyclone victims to return to their native villages near Labutta, and only allowed five pregnant women and some children to remain behind.

¶7. (C) UNHCR staff member Christiane Blessing-Win (PROTECT) told pol/econ chief that UNHCR had received multiple reports from its local staff in the Delta that authorities were forcing storm victims from government camps, schools, and monasteries. UNHCR had sent a team of international staff to Bogale and Labutta to investigate the reports last Thursday. The officials confirmed several of the reports; they would return to Rangoon this evening with details. Blessing-Win added that her husband was helping cyclone victims at a monastery in South Dagon Township in Rangoon where local authorities had ordered all cyclone victims being sheltered in the monastery to return to their villages.

¶8. (C) Pol/econ chief spoke to UN OCHA staff member Rebecca Richards who told her that the UN had instructed all of its field staff to gather information on forced relocations and report it back to headquarters in Rangoon. She was compiling a report for UN Humanitarian Coordinator John Holmes on the growing problem. Richards was reluctant to speak with pol/econ chief about the forced relocations. She explained that the UN was concerned that "coming out strong" on forced relocation at this time could jeopardize the access to the Delta the regime had recently granted UN international staff.

¶9. (C) Comment: Although the regime has made some concessions by granting access to the Delta for international staff, it is not enough and many cyclone victims continue to be out of reach. The increased militarization of the Delta and increasing reports of cyclone victims being forced to return to their villages without adequate support are troubling. Above all, the regime wants to preserve its

control and save face. It has become ever more urgent that the international community gain much greater access to the Delta in order to prevent further tragedy. While the UN and donors want to help get farmers back on their land, they understand that these people will only return willingly if they can be assured of adequate support to help them back on their feet. The GOB does not seem to be providing that support. The international community is willing, but still does not have access to the remote areas most in need of support. Slowly access has opened, but not nearly enough. We must alert ASEAN and the UN at the highest levels that they must insist on greater access now to prevent a greater tragedy from occurring. End comment.

VILLAROSA